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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001437

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: THE BIG KAHUNAS STRIKE AGAIN

REF: A. RANGOON 1370

[B](#). RANGOON 1372

[C](#). RANGOON 1402

[D](#). RANGOON 1422

Classified By: COM CARMEN MARTINEZ FOR REASONS 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#). (C) Summary: The after-shocks from Prime Minister Khin Nyunt's recent demise again shook the ground in Rangoon over the weekend of November 5-7, as two influential members of the government--the Minister of Labor and the Minister of Home Affairs--were pushed off their perches. Authorities are holding these two latest cabinet casualties in their homes during an ongoing investigation. More regime changes are expected as the SPDC continues to dismantle the political and financial webs constructed by Khin Nyunt during his many years in power. End Summary.

Pace Quickens Over the Week-End

[2](#). (SBU) Following the sacking of former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt on October 19, Senior General Than Shwe and his deputy, Deputy Senior General Maung Aye, have moved deliberately to purge the regime of Khin Nyunt cronies and confidants. They struck again on Friday evening, November 5, "granting permission for retirement" to two top ministers and four deputy ministers, all of whom had links to the deposed Prime Minister, and replaced them with faithful military men.

[3](#). (C) The latest casualties included the Minister of Labor and the Minister of Home Affairs. Like the deposed Prime Minister and other recently ousted officials, the two Ministers are reportedly confined, while under investigation, to their Rangoon homes. The former Labor Minister, U Tinn Win, a recent Burmese Ambassador to the United States (1996-2001), had served concurrently as the Minister in the Prime Minister's Office. In that capacity, he led the Burmese delegation to the UNGA and to ASEAN-European Ministerial Meeting (ASEM) in Hanoi in October. He was a former Colonel in the Office of Military Intelligence, had served earlier as ambassador to Thailand, and as chief negotiator with the Wa and Kokang cease-fire groups. He spoke English well and was comfortable dealing with foreigners (ref C reports on the Chief of Mission's October 25 meeting with him).

[4](#). (SBU) The ousted Minister of Home Affairs, Colonel Tin Hlaing, had been in his post since November 1997. Former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt reportedly recommended him for promotion from Deputy Minister, a post he had held from 1994-97. As Home Affairs Minister, he had oversight of forced labor issues and, in that capacity, he issued a 1999 directive, with minimal effect, ordering all departments to stop that practice. He was also responsible for issues related to trafficking-in-persons (TIPs), and was the senior Burmese official at a recent regional conference held in Rangoon on that subject (ref d).

[5](#). (SBU) The four deputy Ministers who lost their positions in the latest purge were from the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (Brig Gen Khin Maung); Ministry of Industry-1 (Brig Gen Kyaw Win); Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries (U Aung Thein); and the Ministry of Science and Technology (U Nyi Hla Nge). All had connections to the fallen Prime Minister and were said to have failed to meet performance targets for their offices.

New Ministers: True Grit

[6](#). (C) The new Minister of Home Affairs, Major General Maung Oo, was promoted from his current posts as Commander of the Western Military District (Rakhine State) and Chairman of the Rakhine State Peace and Development Council. He gained notoriety for his oppressive military operations against Karen and Mon insurgents while assigned to the Southeastern region, 1998-2001. While serving in Rakhine State, he was responsible for forced labor on government beach resorts, hotels, dams, and canals. In December 2002, when Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) visited Rakhine State, he ordered the construction of road blocks to impede her followers and turned out fire trucks with water canons to break up the crowds.

[7](#). (SBU) Colonel (retired) U Thaung, Minister for Science

and Technology and Chairman of the Myanmar Investment Commission, will take the portfolio of Minister of Labor along with his current responsibilities. Colonel U Thaung was a classmate of Deputy Senior General Maung Aye in the Burmese military academy, where he was the top student in his class (note: Maung Aye was reportedly at the bottom of the same class. End note). He is from the same home town (Kyaukse) as Senior General Than Shwe. After preceding U Tinn Win as Ambassador to Washington, U Thaung became Minister of Industry. In 1997, he was appointed Minister of Science and Technology, with responsibility for managing the Universities of Technology and Computer Science, along with other government technical institutes. He is notorious for heavy-handed management and control of the schools he heads, as well as the students who attend them.

18. (SBU) The new Deputy Minister for Science and Technology is U Kyaw Soe, currently Director General, Technical and Vocational Education Department in the same ministry. The other three new deputies have yet to be named.

More Fall Out Likely

19. Comment: These changes appear to be part of a slow, but inexorable, tightening of the screws that hold Senior General Than Shwe's ship of state together. Concurrent to the latest cabinet changes, the SPDC also released a lengthy (17-page) tract, in Burmese and English, detailing Prime Minister Khin Nyunt's dismissal for corruption, the point of which appeared to be to justify their moves to the public--both domestic and foreign. The Government might well be anticipating--and trying to preclude--dissatisfaction with its heavy-handed ways, which are likely to continue as the generals continue to unravel the political and economic webs that Khin Nyunt and his cronies had developed during the 16 years they were riding high.

Martinez